



The Prairie: A Tale (5th Book of the Leatherstocking Tales)

James Fenimore Cooper

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The *Prairie: A Tale* (1827) is a novel by James Fenimore Cooper, the third novel written by him featuring Natty Bumppo. His fictitious frontier hero Bumppo is never called by his name, but is instead referred to as "the trapper" or "the old man." Chronologically *The Prairie* is the fifth and final installment of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, though it was published before *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841). It depicts Natty in the final year of his life still proving helpful to people in distress on the American frontier. The book frequently references characters and events from the two books previously published in the *Leatherstocking Tales* as well as the two which Cooper wouldn't write for more than ten years. Continuity with *The Last of the Mohicans* is indicated by the appearance of the grandson of Duncan and Alice Heyward, as well as the noble Pawnee chief Hard Heart, whose name is English for the French nickname for the Delaware, le Coeur-dur. The story opens with Ishmael, his family, Ellen and Abiram slowly making their way across the virgin prairies of the Midwest looking for a homestead, just two years after the Louisiana Purchase, and during the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. They meet the trapper (Natty Bumppo), who has left his home in New York state to find a place where he cannot hear the sound of people cutting down the forests. In the years between his other adventures and this novel, he tells us only that he has walked all the way to the Pacific Ocean and seen all the land between the coasts (a heroic feat, considering Lewis and Clark hadn't yet completed the same trek). That night, a band of Teton warriors steal all of Ishmael's animals, stranding the immigrants.

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